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The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News _____
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 The Chicago Tribune _____
 St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) _____
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Mr. Casey's CIA

Those three words explain the problem: The late William J. Casey thought the Central Intelligence Agency was his to do with as he saw fit, to influence and make American foreign policy as he wanted, to act independently of the restraining oversight of Congress and to bypass even the president if necessary. It was Bill Casey's CIA, not the American people's. The CIA, as Mr. Casey saw it, was not accountable to Congress. It existed not merely for legitimate intelligence-gathering purposes; it was an agency that attempted to overthrow governments and, at least in the case of Nicaragua, fabricated a resistance movement against a government recognized diplomatically by the United States.

If Bob Woodward's book, "Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987," is correct, then Mr. Casey, while director of central intelligence, proved again the inherent danger that covert operations of a national intelligence-gathering agency pose for a democracy. There is no neat, simple way around this conflict. Banning secret actions, which may be the proper course, will not work if those running the agency put themselves above law. The allure of the shadow world must always be recognized, understood and combatted. For democracy to win out, intelligence agencies must recognize and accept accountability to designated representatives of the people.

When Mr. Casey took over, some in the CIA were chafing under the reforms enacted by Congress in the mid-1970s as a result of the shocking anti-democratic ac-

tions revealed by the Church Committee. As Robert M. Gates, the deputy director, noted last week, the CIA since has often found itself at odds with Congress over foreign policy initiatives and their analyses.

Mr. Gates lamented the power shift that has given Congress more timely intelligence information: "The end result is to strengthen the congressional hand in policy debates and to heighten greatly the tensions between the CIA and the rest of the executive branch."

It's understandable that the CIA would interpret its information differently from, say, the State Department or key members of Congress. What is neither understandable nor acceptable, however, is that a part of the agency would strike out on its own, develop its own foreign policy and run covert operations without clearance from Congress or the executive branch.

Yet that is what Mr. Casey's CIA has done, as told by Mr. Woodward after many conversations with the intelligence chief. As Mr. Woodward notes, Mr. Casey had at least tacit consent from President Reagan, as well as a philosophical agreement that the time had come to reverse the tide of communist victories around the world. Gathering intelligence to be used by the executive branch wasn't enough: "Casey wanted active anti-communism."

That may be what he got. What the country got in return was the Iran-Contra affair and a series of damaging blows to U.S. foreign policy, American credibility and an erosion of democratic values.